



Written by [David Kelly](#) on May 1, 2023

## Oregon Bill Would Decriminalize Homeless Camps

Oregon has one of the [highest rates](#) of homelessness in the United States, growing by 23 percent between 2020 and 2022, leading Democratic Governor Tina Kotek to sign a \$200 million [legislative](#) package in March to address the state's homelessness crisis.

According to the [Oregon Capital Chronicle](#), the package provides for "more than \$112 million to expand the state's shelter capacity by 700 beds and help about 1,650 homeless Oregonians move into permanent homes within the next year. The package also includes \$25 million for homeless youth and more than \$33 million for rent assistance to help nearly 9,000 families stay in their homes."



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"The resources in this package will help prevent homelessness for more Oregonians, supply more transitional shelter capacity, rehouse individuals experiencing homelessness, innovate in housing construction so we can support more production, and better serve specific populations with their shelter needs," Kotek [said](#).

But it appears that the \$200 million package wasn't enough for two Democratic Oregon state lawmakers, who introduced the Oregon Right to Rest Act, or [HB 3501](#), that will decriminalize homeless encampments. The bill, sponsored by Representatives Farrah Chaichi and Khanh Pham, is scheduled to be debated in a hearing this week. If the bill passes and gains Gov. Kotek's signature, it will have a huge impact on how homelessness is treated throughout the state.

The [bill text](#) states that "many persons in Oregon have experienced homelessness as a result of economic hardship, a shortage of safe and affordable housing, the inability to obtain gainful employment and a disintegrating social safety net system." The legislation argues that "decriminalization of rest allows local governments to redirect resources from local law enforcement activities to activities that address the root causes of homelessness and poverty." If passed as it is now written, the new law will give homeless people the right to sue for up to \$1,000 if they are harassed.

The *Washington Examiner* [reported](#):

"It is declared to be the public policy of Oregon to guarantee persons experiencing homelessness participation in the social and economic life of this state, remunerative employment, use of and free movement within public spaces, participation in and receipt of the benefits of the services, programs and activities of state government and local governments and housing accommodations of the person's choice, without discrimination," the bill reads.

It defines harassment as a "knowing and willful course of conduct directed at a person



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experiencing homelessness that a reasonable person would consider as seriously alarming, tormenting or terrorizing of the person experiencing homelessness.” It does not consider the vice versa of homeless people harassing residents — something many have complained about.

Homelessness is a growing problem across the nation, especially in major cities, with many residents complaining to local governments about increased crime and other issues that accompany the homeless. That holds true in Oregon, as well. A number of residents are openly opposing the Right to Rest Act, with some even considering moving.

The *Examiner* [shared](#):

“It makes you not feel that great about living here. It makes living in the neighborhood harder, not as congenial as it could be,” 30-year-old Portland resident Greg Dilkes [said](#) of the homeless encampment along the Peninsula Crossing Trail near his home. “It’s the first time in a long time that we’ve actually seriously thought about moving.”

“Every day if you go from one end of the street to the other, you’re confronting some very difficult situations, people in really dire straits,” one Portland resident said in August, adding that people there felt unsafe.

“Most people don’t want to have to worry about if they can leave their car parked in their driveway overnight without maybe having it broken into. It’s a pretty testy subject,” another said.

The Democratic lawmakers are either unaware of or choosing to ignore the ugly reality that homelessness brings to communities, which many of their constituents suffer through on a daily basis.

One business owner [commented](#) on the proposed bill, stating, “Putting more options on ‘the books’ with no consequences WITH TEETH, does NOT fix any of the problems Oregon taxpayer / business owners face on a daily basis.... Until you can explain how your HB 3501 WILL BE cost affective [sic] and produce results, I oppose HB3501.”

If the Oregon Right to Rest Act dies in committee, that will be the end of this harmful legislation. But considering the current leadership in the state, even more residents may have to consider moving.



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